

Last week I visited some of our facilities impacted by Hurricane Katrina and had a chance to spend a couple of days with our folks working in the area. While the devastation was tremendous, the response of the Fish and Wildlife Service is truly inspirational. From the initial rescue operations in New Orleans where FWS folks rescued or otherwise assisted nearly 2500 people, to the Incident Command Team and Service staff from around the region working at Big Branch Marsh NWR which is serving as a base of operations for our community service efforts and is providing food and shelter for hundreds of people, to the Service staff who have had their homes and everything they owned destroyed yet continue to work and help others, words cannot express how proud I am to be a part of this agency.

I wish I could relate to each of you the stories of everyone I met and share with you what our folks are doing to help people who have been devastated by this terrible disaster. Such an accounting would fill many pages. In time, we will tell this story so that everyone will know what the FWS has done. For now, I want you to know that our colleagues are writing another chapter in the proud history of this agency.

As we continue to respond, no doubt many more of you will add to this chapter. The outpouring of offers to help from around the Service are numerous and the responses to specific requests for assistance are truly impressive. Leading this agency for the past six months has been the most humbling experience of my life as each day you are reminded of the quality of the people who work for the Fish and Wildlife Service.

During my visit to the area, Russ Watson, the Ecological Services Field Supervisor in Lafayette, Louisiana, when talking about the response of the Service, said, "It's one thing to supervise people who are smarter than you or more technically competent than you. It's another thing to supervise folks who are simply better people than you."

I could not have said it any better.

Matt Hogan